

MARTIN LUTHER'S THEOLOGY OF JUSTIFICATION  
A RESPONSE TO THE NEW FINNISH INTERPRETATION OF LUTHER

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF DIVINITY

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MEQUON, WISCONSIN

MARCH 7, 2018

## ABSTRACT

In his writings, Martin Luther strove to present justification as the glorious gift that it is: God's free forgiveness given on the basis of Jesus' sacrifice for sinners. The Lutheran Confessions rightly maintain this truth. However, some modern scholars have attempted to separate Luther's theology from that of the Confessions. In seeking common ground with the Russian Orthodox Church, theologians from the Lutheran Church of Finland have concluded that Luther's understanding of justification includes not only God's forensic declaration of righteousness on account of Jesus' life and death, but also the actual righteousness created by the divine indwelling of Christ in the heart of the believer. This paper will prove from Scripture and from the writings of Luther that the justification of the sinner rests solely on the vicarious work of Christ, that on this point both Luther and the Confessions are in agreement with Scripture, and that the confusion of this doctrine – exemplified by the New Finnish Interpretation of Luther – robs Christians of the comfort God wants them to have.

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## INTRODUCTION

In his *Smalcald Articles*, Martin Luther wrote concerning justification,

Nothing in this article can be conceded or given up, even if heaven and earth or whatever is transitory passed away. . . . On this article stands all that we teach and practice against the pope, the devil, and the world. Therefore we must be quite certain and have no doubt about it. Otherwise everything is lost, and the pope and the devil and whatever opposes us will gain the victory and be proved right.<sup>1</sup>

The Reformer devoted his life to preserving the blessed doctrine of how sinners are justified before God. However, through the centuries since Luther's death, many have tried to make Luther's words say things they were never intended to say. One modern example of this is the "New Finnish Interpretation of Luther."

For four decades, the Lutheran Church of Finland, originally under the leadership of Tuomo Mannermaa (1937–2015), has been conducting research in Luther's works with the intention of finding common ground with Eastern Orthodox theology. Among other things, Mannermaa's disciples claim to have found support in Luther's writings for an understanding of justification that is compatible with the Eastern Orthodox view of *theosis*. The Lutheran Confessions clearly make such a hypothesis impossible. Therefore, Finnish theologians have made the claim that the Lutheran Confessions, in particular the *Formula of Concord*, do not accurately portray the theology of Martin Luther. They assert that the *Formula* makes distinctions in the doctrine of justification that Luther does not.

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1. SA II, I: 5. Quotations from the Lutheran Confessions are taken from: Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000).

It is the purpose of this paper to examine the New Finnish Interpretation of Luther, with an emphasis on Mannermaa's chief work, *Christ Present in Faith*.<sup>2</sup> To this end, the paper will briefly outline the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of *theosis*, the history of ecumenical dialogue between the Finnish Lutherans and the Russian Orthodox Church, and the view of justification as expressed in the *Formula of Concord*. The paper will then analyze Mannermaa's thought as expressed in *Christ Present in Faith*. The paper will demonstrate that in the theology of Martin Luther, as in the *Formula and Concord* and in Holy Scripture, the divine indwelling of Christ in the believer is not to be included in the doctrine of justification.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### **The Eastern Orthodox Doctrine of *Theosis***

In the Holy Scriptures, where God himself speaks, we read of a unique call directed to us. God speaks to us human beings clearly and directly: "I said, 'You are gods, sons of the Most High – all of you'" (Ps. 82:6; John 10:34). Do we hear his voice? Do we understand the meaning of this calling? Do we accept that we should in fact be on a journey, a road which leads to *theosis*?<sup>3</sup>

Christoforos Stavropoulos, an Eastern Orthodox priest, offers this definition for *theosis*: "It means the elevation of the human being to the divine sphere, to the atmosphere of God. It means the union of the human with the divine."<sup>4</sup> This union is central to Eastern Orthodox theology. For them it is the reason mankind exists – our single greatest goal and calling.

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2. Originally published as Tuomo Mannermaa, *Der im Glauben gegenwärtige Christus: Rechtfertigung und Vergottung. Zum ökumenischen Dialog* (Hannover: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1989).

3. Christoforos Stavropoulos, "Partakers of Divine Nature." Pages 183–192 in *Eastern Orthodox Theology*. Edited by Daniel Clendenin (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 184.

4. Stavropoulos, 184.

To properly understand the significance of *theosis* in Eastern Orthodox thought, one must first recognize that the Eastern Orthodox Church approaches the doctrine of soteriology from a fundamentally different paradigm from that of the Western Church. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, docent of Ecumenical Theology at the University of Helsinki, explains, “According to Eastern theology, Latin traditions have been dominated by legal, judicial, and forensic categories. Eastern theology, on the contrary, understands the need of salvation in terms of deliverance from mortality and corruption for life everlasting.”<sup>5</sup> In the West, the Church speaks of salvation as freedom from the guilt of sin. But in the East, humanity’s main problem to be solved is mortality. In the beginning, God created Adam and Eve in his image and in his likeness.<sup>6</sup> To the Eastern Orthodox, this means that Adam and Eve were perfect participants in God’s incorruptible divine nature. They were immortal. They were, in a sense, “gods.”<sup>7</sup> When our first parents succumbed to the temptation of Satan and fell into sin, the divine gift of the *likeness* of God was lost, but his *image* was only weakened.<sup>8</sup> It is our divinely-mandated prerogative to reclaim God’s likeness through the process of *theosis* – to conquer carnal corruption and death by participation in the fullness of God.

Because the removal of guilt is not emphasized in the soteriology of the Eastern Orthodox Church, neither is it emphasized in their understanding of the significance of Jesus’ death:

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5. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2004), 29–30.

6. Confessional Lutheranism makes no distinction between the *image* and *likeness* of God. Both refer to man’s created state of perfection in which all his thoughts and actions conformed to the will of God.

7. It should be noted that this teaching is not meant to negate the human nature. Being created in the *likeness* of God is not the same thing as being created in the *essence* of God. In *theosis*, man participates not in the essence of God, but in “divine energies” which are granted by the grace of God.

8. Stavropoulos, 187.

In the East, the cross of Christ is envisaged not so much as the punishment of the just one, which “satisfies” transcendent Justice requiring a retribution for human beings’ sin. Rather, “the death of the Cross was effective, not as the death of an Innocent One, but as the death of the Incarnate Lord.” The point was not to satisfy legal requirement, but to vanquish death.<sup>9</sup>

Because God alone is able to vanquish death and restore immortality, he did this in the cross of Christ. And having vanquished death, Jesus made it possible for man to reclaim what was lost in the Fall. This was the primary purpose for the incarnation of the Logos. Vladimir Lossky, Eastern Orthodox theologian, explains, “The vocation of the first Adam was fulfilled by Christ, the second Adam. God became man that man might become god, to use the words of Irenaeus and Athanasius, echoed by the Fathers and theologians of every age.”<sup>10</sup> Because of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, man is able to realize his true purpose: *theosis*.

*Theosis* in the life of the Christian is not instantaneous. It is up to each individual Christian to grow in *theosis* by renunciation of the sinful passions of the world and the pursuit of love and good works. In doing this, man participates progressively more in the divine.

Kärkkäinen explains,

The deification of the creature will be, of course, realized in its fullness only in the age to come. The deifying union nevertheless has to be fulfilled ever more and more even in the present life. Consequently, Eastern theologians do not shy away from speaking of divine-human *synergy*, the cooperation of the person with God. Men and women are saved by grace, but not without one’s total devotion and willingness to be transformed.<sup>11</sup>

In its doctrine of *theosis*, the Eastern Orthodox Church openly embraces an understanding of synergism<sup>12</sup> by which man cooperates in his regrowth in the image of God.

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9. Kärkkäinen, 22.

10. Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1976), 133–134.

11. Kärkkäinen, 31, emphasis his.

12. This point is significant: the Eastern Orthodox acknowledge and confess the synergistic component of their soteriology. Tuomo Mannermaa’s followers do not.

In this synergistic understanding of salvation, the Eastern Orthodox strive to maintain an emphasis on the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit. Stavropoulos expounds, “Only with the Holy Spirit will we be able to receive and taste redemption and *theosis*. Only in the Holy Spirit will we reach the point of becoming gods, the likeness of God. Only the Holy Spirit will transmit to us that which the Son and Word of God has offered to us.”<sup>13</sup> According to Eastern Orthodox theology, the Holy Spirit sets us on the road toward *theosis*, and he strengthens us as we advance toward our goal, cooperating with his grace.

This striving toward participation in the divine – although never complete this side of eternity – forms the whole of the Eastern Orthodox understanding of salvation. This is notably problematic when one considers Scripture’s presentation of the human condition – even in the regenerate. Saint Paul confesses, “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing” (Rom 7:18–19, ESV). Although he had faith in Christ, Paul struggled daily with his sinful flesh – the sinful flesh that persists in all believers after they have been converted. If Paul’s salvation were dependent on his growth in *theosis* and his cooperation with the work of God, he would have had no confidence. Indeed, he would have been lost. Paul’s confidence rested not in his own effective righteousness, but in the redeeming work of Christ: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith” (Rom 3:23–24).

On the basis of Jesus’ perfect life and innocent death in the place of sinners, God acquits of their guilt all who believe. The Christian’s righteousness before God, his salvation, and his

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13. Stavropoulos, 188.



eternal life rest *only* on the vicarious work of Christ. This scriptural truth has always been the very cornerstone of Lutheran theology. Therefore, any attempt to reconcile the Lutheran view of justification with the Eastern Orthodox view of *theosis* would be futile. Professor Timothy Schmeling of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary concludes:

As a result of [theosis taught as salvation], forensic justification is rejected. The Byzantine notion of salvation is deification of man by a gradual infusing of divine uncreated energies. In contradistinction to this, Lutheranism maintains forensic justification and teaches that the mystical union and theosis in the narrow sense encompass sanctification. Sadly the Eastern Orthodox have confused justification and sanctification.<sup>14</sup>

The Eastern Orthodox and Lutheran understandings of soteriology are fundamentally opposed to each other. In spite of this, the Finnish Lutherans, under the leadership of Tuomo Mannermaa, have labored toward finding common ground with the Orthodox on the basis of this very doctrine of *theosis*.

### **The Lutheran – Orthodox Dialogue**

The Lutheran Church in Finland traces its roots to Mikael Agricola, a student of Luther and Melancthon. Agricola brought the Reformation from Germany and developed Finland’s written language in order to translate the Bible, Luther’s Small Catechism, and several other ecclesiastical works for the Finnish populace. Because Agricola only translated the works of Luther and not those of the other Lutheran theologians, the Finnish Lutherans have always drawn their heritage primarily from Luther directly and not from the Lutheran Confessions.<sup>15</sup>

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14. Timothy Schmeling, “Life in Christ: The *Unio Mystica* and its Relation to Theosis,” *WLS Essay File*, 2016, <http://essays.wls.wels.net/handle/123456789/4290>.

15. Kirsti Stjerna, “Finnish Interpretation of Luther.” Pages 252–255 in *Dictionary of Luther and the Lutheran Traditions*. Edited by Timothy Wengert (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 255.

As the easternmost country in Scandinavia, it is no surprise that Finland was affected by both Eastern and Western influences. Since the time of Agricola, Lutheranism has always had a prominent presence. The Orthodox Church of Russia has also been prevalent. During the twentieth century, the worldwide ecumenical movement drove these two groups into discussion seeking convergence in doctrine. Mannermaa, systematic theologian and professor of Ecumenical Theology at the University of Helsinki, was charged with the task of researching the writings of Luther in order to uncover similarities between his treatment of the doctrine of justification and the Eastern Orthodox understanding of *theosis*. As research advanced and conversations between churches continued, the Lutherans and the Orthodox issued several joint statements concerning salvation. The most striking of these was presented in Kiev in 1977. Its preamble was recorded by Risto Saarinen, current chair of Ecumenics at the University of Helsinki:

Until recently, there has been a predominant opinion that the Lutheran and Orthodox doctrines of salvation greatly differ from each other. In the conversations, however, it has become evident that both these important aspects of salvation discussed in the conversations have a strong New Testament basis and there is great unanimity with regard to them both.<sup>16</sup>

Although there had always been a recognized rift between Eastern Orthodoxy and Lutheranism, on the basis of the discussions between the Finns and the Russians, that rift seemed to be closing.

While the Finnish Lutherans pursued agreement with the Eastern Orthodox, other Lutheran groups were hesitant to join in discussions. European groups, such as the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD), rejected the inherent synergism of the Orthodox. In addition, they

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16. Risto Saarinen, "Salvation in the Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue." Pages 167–181 in *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*. Edited by Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 169.

also feared that an acceptance of Orthodox *theosis* would lead to a theology of glory.<sup>17</sup> These misgivings were addressed by a paper presented by Mannermaa in Kiev. This paper was later expanded into a book entitled *Christ Present in Faith*. Mannermaa outlined several places in Luther's 1535 lectures on Galatians in which – according to Mannermaa – he teaches Christ's essential presence in faith and the *theosis* of the Christian. Mannermaa asserts that for Luther there is no distinction between justification and sanctification, that *theosis* and justification are analogous, and that those who do not recognize *theosis* in Luther's theology of justification are not rightly understanding Luther.

Because of its ecumenical implications, Mannermaa's work was received with eagerness. Based on the continued research of Mannermaa and his colleagues, several other Lutheran groups around the world entered into joint discussions with their Orthodox neighbors. Most notably, in 1988, the EKD, with the Romanian Orthodox Church, produced the tract "Justification and Glorification of the Human Person." Because the new Scandinavian studies in Luther were published almost exclusively in German and Finnish, conversations between Orthodox groups and English-speaking Lutherans were rare to start. However, in the 1990s, many of the Finns' works were translated into English and widely distributed – largely by the efforts of Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson.<sup>18</sup> In recent years, discussions have continued both regionally and globally.

It is particularly significant to note that in their research, the Finnish Lutherans have concluded that the term "Lutheran" could refer to two different theological paradigms: "Lutheran' has two meanings: it can denote either Martin Luther's theology as it is expressed in

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17. Saarinen, 170.

18. Kärkkäinen, 38.

his own writings or the theology/theologies of Lutheran confessions and subsequent Lutheran formulations.”<sup>19</sup> In his works, Mannermaa claims that the Lutheran Confessions, in particular the *Formula of Concord*, are not faithful representations of Luther’s doctrine of justification:

There is no doubt that the idea of the believer’s real participation in Christ is an essential part of Luther’s theology of justification. At least on the level of terminology, the distinction between justification and the divine indwelling in the believer, made by the *Formula of Concord* and by the major part of later Lutheran theology, is alien to the Reformer.<sup>20</sup>

Mannermaa boldly asserts that by making a clear distinction between salvation and divine indwelling – between justification and sanctification – the *Formula of Concord* does not accurately portray the theology of Luther.

### **Justification in the *Formula of Concord***

Mannermaa’s disdain for the *Formula of Concord* is not surprising. The *Formula’s* article on justification was written partially as a response to Andreas Osiander: a disciple of the Reformation whose teachings on justification were very similar to those of Mannermaa. Interestingly, Osiander was an extremely active follower of Luther’s Reformation for years before his heretical views of soteriology were recognized. He was present at the Marburg Colloquy, the Diet of Augsburg of 1530, and the signing of the Smalcald Articles. He rejected both the Augsburg and Leipzig Interims and was banished for doing so. Forced to leave his professorial position in Nuremberg, Osiander was welcomed in Königsberg by Albrecht of Brandenburg. After he had taught in Königsberg for a number of years, Osiander’s teachings were challenged.

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19. Kärkkäinen, 37.

20. Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther’s View of Justification* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 41.

Heavily influenced by medieval Jewish philosophy, Osiander taught that the justification of the sinner is not based on Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross, but on his indwelling in the hearts of believers. "He held to justification through faith but taught that faith serves as a channel by which the divine Son of God comes to dwell in believers, placing in them the essential divine righteousness of his divine person."<sup>21</sup> According to Osiander, justification is not God's forensic "not-guilty" verdict over sinners, but an essential change in the heart of the Christian. Through Jesus' indwelling, he taught, the sinful nature is put to death and the believer becomes God's holy child. Osiander's teaching also demonstrated a division of the two natures of Christ. He taught that Jesus does not make the sinner righteous in his human nature, but only in his divine nature, as he dwells in the heart of the believer.

Osiander was first opposed by Martin Chemnitz and Joachim Mörlin, but as his writings gained repute, almost all the Lutheran theologians recognized that Osiander's teaching conformed neither to Luther nor to Scripture. They recognized that Osiander's erroneous view of justification stripped the gospel of its comfort for believers:

For Osiander, the Christ in us, understood as the indwelling of Christ with his essential divine righteousness, is our justification. The Christ for us, his satisfaction for our sins, is merely the prerequisite for the Christ in us; it merely makes it possible. The Christ in us, as his essential divine righteousness, effects also our renewal, our sanctification. So we have a sanctification that is not directly gospel motivated. The Christ for us is pushed into the background, lost out of sight.<sup>22</sup>

The other Lutheran theologians unanimously agreed that the sinner's righteousness before God is based only on what Christ has done as the sinner's substitute – on his perfect life of obedience and his redeeming death on the cross. Osiander's heresy undermined the very heart of the gospel.

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21. Charles Arand, Robert Kolb, and James Nestingen, *The Lutheran Confessions: History and Theology of the Book of Concord*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 219.

22. Carl Lawrenz, "On Justification, Osiander's Doctrine of the Indwelling Christ." Pages 149–174 in *No Other Gospel*, edited by Arnold Koelpin (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1980), 168.

Article III of the *Formula of Concord* offers a definitive answer both to the works-righteousness of the Roman Catholics, and to Osiander's confusion of justification and sanctification. The article begins:

The third conflict among some theologians of the Augsburg Confession concerned the righteousness of Christ, or of faith, which God reckons to poor sinners as righteousness through faith on the basis of his grace.

The one party argued that the righteousness of faith, which the apostle Paul calls the righteousness of God, is the essential righteousness of God, which Christ himself (as the true, natural, essential Son of God) is. He dwells in the elect through faith and impels them to do what is right and is therefore their righteousness. In comparison to this righteousness the sins of all people are like a drop of water compared to the ocean.

On the other hand, some have held and taught that Christ is our righteousness only according to his human nature.

Against both parties other teachers of the Augsburg Confession have preached unanimously that Christ is our righteousness not only according to his divine nature and also not only according to his human nature, but according to both natures. As God and as human being he has redeemed us from all sin, made us righteous, and saved us through his perfect obedience. Therefore, they have taught that the righteousness of faith is the forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, and that we are accepted as children of God for the sake of Christ's obedience alone, which is reckoned as righteousness through faith alone, out of sheer grace, to all who truly believe. Because of this they are absolved from all their unrighteousness.<sup>23</sup>

The formulators defend against Osiander's error by emphasizing several points of doctrine. Firstly, Article III stresses that the sinner's righteousness before God is based entirely on Jesus' vicarious obedience and innocent death: "As a result of [Jesus'] total obedience – which he performed on our behalf for God in his deeds and suffering, in life and death – God forgives our sin, considers us upright and righteous, and grants us eternal salvation."<sup>24</sup> In his perfect life and death, Jesus Christ – as true God and true man – served as substitute for mankind, and earned forgiveness for the sins of the world.

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23. FC, SD III: 1–4.

24. FC, SD III: 15.

In close connection with this, the *Formula* also decisively sets the source of justification *outside* of the sinner, not in his heart:

Neither the divine nor the human nature of Christ in itself is reckoned to us as righteousness, but only the obedience of the person, who is at the same time God and a human being. Therefore, faith looks to the person of Christ, as this person submitted to the law for us, bore our sin, and in going to his Father performed complete and perfect obedience for us poor sinners, from his holy birth to his death. Thereby he covered all our disobedience, which is embedded in our nature and in its thoughts, words, and deeds, so that this disobedience is not reckoned to us as condemnation but is pardoned and forgiven by sheer grace, because of Christ alone.<sup>25</sup>

The formulators leave no room for confusion. The righteousness that justifies the sinner cannot be found in the heart of the believer, but only in the merit of Christ. Without question, the *Formula of Concord* teaches a “Jesus *for* me” mode of justification, and reserves any idea of “Jesus *in* me” for sanctification.

In that regard, Article III also rejects any mixture of justification and sanctification: “If the article on justification is to remain pure, we must take special care not to introduce into the article on justification itself or to mix with it what precedes faith or what results from it, as if they were necessary parts of it and belonged to it.”<sup>26</sup> And later:

Therefore, even if the converted and believers have the beginnings of renewal, sanctification, love, virtues, and good works, yet these cannot, should not, and must not be introduced or mixed with the article of justification before God, so that the proper honor may continue to be accorded our Redeemer Christ and (because our new obedience is imperfect and impure) so that the consciences under attack may have reliable comfort.<sup>27</sup>

Scripture certainly teaches the indwelling of Christ in the hearts of believers, but this truth belongs to sanctification, not justification. To confuse the two is to rob sinners of the comfort

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25. FC, SD III: 58.

26. FC, SD III: 24.

27. FC, SD III: 35.

God wants them to have on the basis of his declaration of forgiveness. Accordingly, the formulators reject “that faith looks not to Christ’s obedience alone, but to his divine nature as it dwells in us and works in us, and that through this indwelling our sins are covered in his sight.”<sup>28</sup>

The *Formula of Concord* denies the indwelling of Christ as part of the righteousness of faith before God. Instead, it views Jesus’ perfect life and death as the only source of man’s justification. For Jesus’ sake, sinners are *declared* righteous and their sins are not imputed to them. Sanctification, divine indwelling, and good works are not to be mingled with this central doctrine of Christianity. Therefore, on the basis of the *Formula*, it is clear that Eastern Orthodox *theosis* and Lutheran justification are completely incompatible.

This view of justification was not a new innovation set forth by the formulators. The Lutheran Church has understood justification in this way from its very conception. At the Diet of Augsburg in 1530, the followers of Luther’s Reformation confessed with Philip Melanchthon,

Furthermore, it is taught that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God through our merit, work, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God out of grace for Christ’s sake through faith when we believe that Christ has suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will *regard* and *reckon* this faith as righteousness in his sight, as St. Paul says in Romans 3 and 4.<sup>29</sup>

At no point in the history of Lutheranism has divine indwelling been recognized as a basis for the sinner’s righteousness in the sight of God. Justification has always been God’s acquittal given by grace for the sake of the vicarious work of Christ. Divine indwelling belongs under the article of sanctification.

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28. FC, SD III: 63.

29. AC IV: 1–3, German text, emphasis added.



Tuomo Mannermaa and his school of Finnish Lutherans have concluded that Luther did not share the clear distinction shown in the Lutheran Confessions – particularly in the *Formula of Concord*. They see Article III as an overreaction to Osiander and they claim that for Luther, justification and sanctification are the same thing: the renewal of the sinner in righteousness through the indwelling of Christ through faith.

Article III of the *Formula of Concord* ends with a reference to Luther:

For any further, necessary explanation of this lofty and sublime article on justification before God, upon which the salvation of our souls depends, we wish to recommend to everyone the wonderful, magnificent exposition by Dr. Luther of St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, and for the sake of brevity we refer to it at this point.<sup>30</sup>

The confessors see their doctrine as so closely connected to Luther's that they are willing to point readers to selections from his private writings for doctrinal clarification.<sup>31</sup> That the formulators appeal to Luther's 1535 lectures on Galatians for further support is particularly interesting because Mannermaa does the very same thing. In his work *Christ Present in Faith*, Mannermaa explains how Luther's doctrine of justification includes a concept of *theosis*. His work frequently cites sections and quotations of Luther's lectures on Galatians. It will now be our endeavor to examine Mannermaa's treatment of Luther, as well as Luther's comments on justification in connection with Scripture.

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30. FC, SD III: 67.

31. This citation in and of itself demonstrates that, at least in the minds of the confessors, there existed an intimately close relationship between Martin Luther's theology and the Lutheran Confessions. Many of the formulators learned directly from Luther. As his disciples in the faith, they strove to maintain the doctrine he had taught them.

## JUSTIFICATION IN MANNERMAA AND LUTHER

### **The Righteousness of Faith**

Mannermaa's understanding of justification presents the critical reader with a number of difficulties. Firstly, Mannermaa explains some things very well. For example, with Luther he decisively rejects the law as a source of man's justification.<sup>32</sup> However, as will be discussed, this rejection is negated by Mannermaa's understanding of indwelling righteousness. Secondly, although Mannermaa deals almost exclusively with Martin Luther's 1535 lectures on Galatians, he interacts very little with the epistle itself. Because Mannermaa divorces Luther's comments from their subject, Mannermaa's treatment of Luther often loses sight of the commentary's original context. Finally, Mannermaa often defends his assertions using Luther's own terminology, but having in mind a vastly different understanding of certain theological concepts. One of the most important examples of this is in Mannermaa's definition of faith.

Luther defines faith simply by saying, "Faith is nothing else but the truth of the heart, that is, the right knowledge of the heart about God."<sup>33</sup> Faith receives, believes, and clings to God's forgiveness in Christ:

We want to retain and to extol this faith which God has called faith, that is, a true and certain faith that has no doubts about God or the divine promises or the forgiveness of sins through Christ. Then we can remain safe and sure in Christ, the object of faith, and keep before our eyes the suffering and the blood of the Mediator and all his blessings. Faith alone, which takes hold of Christ, is the only means to keep us from permitting this to be removed from our sight.<sup>34</sup>

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32. Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 31–37.

33. Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Volume 26* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963), 238.

34. *LW* 26: 270.

When speaking about justifying faith, Luther's focus is always on the object of faith: Christ's redeeming sacrifice. In justification, faith itself is passive.

Mannermaa's view of faith is much more active. Where Luther's faith receives, Mannermaa's *participates*: "It is central to the idea of Luther's theology that in faith human beings *really* participate in the person of Christ, and in the divine life and victory that come with him."<sup>35</sup> For Mannermaa, faith is much more than a passive reception of God's forgiveness for the sake of Jesus' vicarious sacrifice for sinners on the cross. Instead, faith is constituted by Jesus' residence in the hearts of believers, and by his essential righteousness. Through divine indwelling, this righteousness now belongs to the believer and the believer now participates in God's divine holiness. Clearly, two distinctly different understandings of faith are here in contention.

Mannermaa attributes this discrepancy to a shift in philosophical thought after the death of Luther. The problem lies not with Luther, but with his successors. Mannermaa sees a discrepancy not between himself and Luther, but between himself and modern Confessional Lutherans. He suggests that the majority of modern Lutherans have been influenced by the writings of Immanuel Kant. This has resulted in the prevailing understanding that the relationship between God and man is purely *ethical*. "According to a 'correct' epistemology, Christ's presence in faith is not a reality in itself, neither a substantial nor an ontological reality, but rather a kind of community of action (affecting) of the divine and human will."<sup>36</sup> Mannermaa opines that in reality, Luther's philosophical paradigm reflected his medieval contemporaries. Therefore, influenced by the mysticism of his day, Luther's understanding of man's relationship

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35. Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 16, emphasis his.

36. Tuomo Mannermaa, "Why Is Luther So Fascinating?" Pages 1–20 in *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*. Edited by Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 8.

with God would have been *ontological*.<sup>37</sup> Mannermaa's perception of faith in current Lutheran thought holds man as distant from God. *His* view of faith brings man and God together, casting faith as the actual dwelling of Christ with his essential righteousness in the hearts of believers. This radically different definition of faith brings about alarming consequences, particularly in the doctrine of justification.

At the center of Mannermaa's theology is the argument that Luther's understanding of the "righteousness of faith" is different from that of the *Formula of Concord* and of the majority of modern Lutherans. Simply put, Mannermaa holds that in justification, man is not only *declared* righteous, but *made* righteous. The basis for the sinner's salvation is not what Jesus has done *for* him, but rather what Jesus does *in* him:

The core of Luther's concept of participation finds expression in the notion of "happy exchange," according to which Christ takes upon himself the sinful person of a human being and bestows his own righteous person upon him or her. What takes place here between Christ and the believer is a kind of communication of attributes: Christ, the divine righteousness, truth, peace, joy, love, power, and life, gives himself to the Christian. At the same time, Christ "absorbs" the believer's sin, death, and curse into himself. As Christians thus *really* participate in Christ, they have no sin or death anymore.<sup>38</sup>

Following Mannermaa's theology of justification, the sinner is made righteous not by Jesus' death on the cross alone, but also by his expulsion of sin through his divine presence in the heart of the believer.

To answer Mannermaa's claims, one need only examine Luther's comments in their intended context. The doctrine of justification is not only central to the theology of Martin Luther, but also to the theology of the Apostle Paul. Justification finds one of its most thorough

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37. I.e. based on actual being.

38. Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 17.

treatments in Paul's letter to the Galatians. This is precisely why Luther valued the epistle so highly. Just as Luther defended justification through faith against the works-righteousness of the papists, fifteen centuries earlier Paul defended justification through faith against the works-righteousness of the Jews.<sup>39</sup> To support the orthodox view of justification, Paul calls to mind Abraham – the favorite patriarch of the Jews. He points back to Genesis 15:6 when he says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness” (Gal 3:6). Paul clearly shows that Abraham's righteousness before God did not come as a result of his observance of God's law, but through his faith in God's free promises. Mannermaa wholeheartedly agrees, but when closely examined, Paul's words show a crucial difference from Mannermaa's understanding of what the righteousness of faith is.

Paul says that Abraham's faith was “counted” as righteousness. The Greek verb used is λογίζομαι. The word means to reckon or consider and is often used as an accounting term.<sup>40</sup> The reader could imagine an accountant's ledger upon which Abraham's righteousness is under examination. His faith in God's promise is *credited* to his ledger as righteousness. When viewed in isolation from the doctrine of sanctification, God's “not-guilty” verdict makes no essential change in the person of Abraham. But from God's perspective, in spite of Abraham's sinfulness, the vicarious righteousness of Christ is counted as Abraham's on account of Christ's innocent suffering and death – even though Christ's sacrifice would not take place for over a thousand years. Therefore, according to Paul (and by extension Moses) faith counted as righteousness does not describe an essential change made *in* the sinner, but rather a change in status before God made *for* the sinner by the shedding of the blood of Christ.

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39. A key difference, of course, is that Paul spoke by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

40. BDAG, 597.

Luther comments extensively on this truth of Scripture:

For, as I have said, these two things make Christian righteousness perfect: The first is faith in the heart, which is a divinely granted gift and which formally believes in Christ; the second is that God reckons this imperfect faith as perfect righteousness for the sake of Christ, His Son, who suffered for the sins of the world and in whom I begin to believe. On account of this faith in Christ God does not see the sin that still remains in me. For so long as I go on living in the flesh, there is certainly sin in me. But meanwhile Christ protects me under the shadow of His wings and spreads over me the wide heaven of the forgiveness of sins, under which I live in safety.<sup>41</sup>

He later writes, “So far as the words are concerned, this fact is easy, namely, that righteousness is not in us in a formal sense, as Aristotle maintains, but it is outside of us, solely in the grace of God and in his imputation.”<sup>42</sup> This teaching of justification creates a paradox: the sinner is still sinful, yet righteous in the sight of God. Luther accounts for this apparent contradiction with his illustration of two Abrahams:

Paul urges this vigorously, as does Scripture itself, when it says (Gen. 15:6): “Abraham believed God, etc.” It does not attribute righteousness to Abraham except as a believer. Therefore Scripture speaks about Abraham as he is in the sight of God. In this new argument there is described a new Abraham, separate from the physical bed, marriage, procreation. He is set forth as he is in the sight of God, that is, believing and justified through faith.<sup>43</sup>

The Abraham of flesh still struggles with sin and has no righteousness before God. The Abraham of faith lives free from sin, declared righteous through faith in the promised Savior. While the Abraham of flesh is worthless and corrupt, the Abraham of faith is exalted and praised. Luther declares, “Thus the Abraham who had faith must be separated from the Abraham who did works as far as heaven is separated from earth. The one who has faith is a completely divine

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41. *LW* 26: 231–232.

42. *LW* 26: 234.

43. *LW* 26: 243.

man, a son of God, the inheritor of the universe. He is a victor over the world, sin, death, and the devil. Hence he cannot be praised enough.”<sup>44</sup>

All this can be said with as much certainty about those who share Abraham’s faith today. Scripture refers to such people as Abraham’s children. Paul writes, “Know then that it is those of faith who are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith” (Gal 3:7–9). As believers in Christ, we trace our lineage not to the Abraham of flesh, but to the Abraham of faith. Just as Abraham’s righteousness before God rested only on God’s gracious imputation for the sake of Jesus’ death, our righteousness is outside of us, won for us on the cross.

In his teaching on justification, Mannermaa conflates the two Abrahams. He combines the sinful man of flesh and the justified man of faith, turning the believer’s attention from the cross of Christ to his own heart where Christ dwells. Because of this, in Mannermaa’s theology, the source of the righteousness of faith is no longer Jesus’ death and resurrection, but his essential righteousness as God.

### **The Source of the Sinner’s Righteousness before God**

Paul clearly sets forth the source of our justification in the familiar words of Galatians 4:4–7:

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

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44. *LW* 26: 247.

So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.” When men were held captive by their sins under the law, God intervened. The eternal Logos was born as a human infant. Jesus Christ – true God and true man – set himself under the law and lived perfectly as the substitute for all mankind. He innocently suffered and offered his own perfect life as a sacrifice to pay for the sins of the world. His death covers our sins and his righteousness is credited to us as our own. Jesus’ perfect life and vicarious sacrifice have secured our redemption and therefore stand as the only source of our justification, righteousness, and sonship before God.

This is also how Luther understands the source of our righteousness:

But by what merit have we received this righteousness, sonship, and inheritance of eternal life? By none. For what could be merited by men confined under sin, subjected to the curse of the Law, and condemned to eternal death? Therefore we have received all this freely and without deserving it, yet not without merit. What merit was it, then? Not ours, but that of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was born under that Law, not for Himself, but for us, and who redeemed us who were under the Law.<sup>45</sup>

For Luther, justifying righteousness before God does not come from anything done *by* us, nor anything done *in* us, but only from what was done *for* us.<sup>46</sup> Justification’s source stands completely independent of man – flowing from Jesus’ wounds on the cross. As Luther himself states above, our status as sons is based solely on the *redemption* of Jesus Christ.

Mannermaa does not understand the source of righteousness in this way. Instead, according to Mannermaa, the justification of the sinner originates in Jesus’ essential righteousness as God. This righteousness belongs to the sinner when Jesus is present in his heart. As was expounded above, when Osiander first introduced this view of justification to Lutheran

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45. LW 26: 374.

46. It should be noted that in Galatians 4:6, Paul does indeed mention the reality of divine indwelling: “And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” However, the text clearly shows that divine indwelling is a result, not a cause, of our becoming sons. This point will be discussed in more detail later.



circles, his teaching clearly showed a confusion of the two natures of Christ. Modern Finnish Lutherans are not oblivious to this. Simo Peura, a student and colleague of Mannermaa, writes:

The problem with Osiander's doctrine was not actually his claim that justification was based on God's indwelling in a Christian, but the Christological presuppositions of his claim. Osiander (in opposition to Luther) separated Christ's human nature and divine nature from each other and broke the *unio personalis* in Christ. Therefore, Christ's human nature and everything that he did as a human being on the cross had only an instrumental and subsidiary role in redemption as well as in justification.<sup>47</sup>

The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther seeks to reclaim the "good" in what Osiander taught, while rejecting his confusion of the two natures. However, a close reading of Mannermaa's work shows that Osiander's error persists.

Mannermaa writes,

As a human being, Christ is the "greatest sinner of all"; at the same time, as the Logos, he is God, the "perfect righteousness and life." Therefore his person is marked by an extreme tension and a most profound contradiction. By his divine nature, Christ is the "Divine Power, Righteousness, Blessing, Grace, and Life." These divine attributes fight against sin, death, and curse – which also culminate in his person – and overcome them. Hence, there is no sin or death anymore because "all sin is gathered together in Christ and he was thus the "only sinner."<sup>48</sup>

Mannermaa seems to teach that the two natures of Christ serve distinctly different purposes. In his human nature, Jesus the man takes into himself all the sinfulness of the world. In his divine nature, Jesus the Logos conquers sin and death with his eternally divine righteousness.

The confusion of the two natures, as shown in Mannermaa's writing, becomes very important in explaining how sinners are justified. When he describes the "happy exchange"<sup>49</sup> that takes place between Christ and the sinner, Jesus in his humanity absorbs our sin and in his

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47. Simo Peura, "Christ as Favor and Gift," Pages 42–69 in *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*. Edited by Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 46.

48. Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 16.

49. Cf. Page 17.

divinity fills us with his own essential righteousness, expelling all corruption. Thus in each individual believer, the divine nature of Christ conquers sin and makes the believer essentially righteous – joining the believer to the divine nature.

Luther does indeed teach at length concerning the “happy exchange.” Mannermaa quotes Luther’s comments on Galatians 3:13, where Paul writes, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us...” Concerning these verses, Luther writes,

By this fortunate exchange with us He took upon Himself our sinful person and granted us His innocent and victorious Person. Clothed and dressed in this, we are freed from the curse of the Law, because Christ himself voluntarily became a curse for us saying, “For My own Person of humanity and divinity I am blessed, and I am in need of nothing whatever. But I shall empty Myself; I shall assume your clothing and mask; and in this I shall walk about and suffer death, in order to set you free from death.” Therefore when, inside our mask, He was carrying the sin of the whole world, He was captured, He suffered, He was crucified, He died, and for us He became a curse. But because He was a divine and eternal Person, it was impossible for death to hold Him. Therefore He arose from death on the third day, and now He lives eternally; nor can sin, death, or our mask be found in Him any longer; but there is sheer righteousness, life, and eternal blessing. We must look at this image and take hold of it with a firm faith. He who does this has the innocence and the victory of Christ, no matter how great a sinner he is.<sup>50</sup>

For Luther, the happy exchange takes place entirely and in the entirety of the person of Christ. He does not divide or confuse the natures. Jesus Christ – true God and true man – took the sin of the world upon himself, was crucified, died, rose, and won forgiveness by his vicarious obedience and sacrifice. On the basis of this redemption, sinners are declared righteous. Faith clings only to the righteousness won by Jesus on the cross.

In addition to dividing the two natures of Christ, Mannermaa’s teaching concerning justification presents a disconcerting question: how is the Christian confident of salvation?

Should he look to the cross of Christ, or into his own heart? For Luther, the answer is clear:

By faith take hold of Christ, the Lord of the Law and of sin and of everything that accompanies them. When you believe in Him, you are justified – something that your

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50. *LW* 26: 284.

reason and the consciousness of your heart do not tell you amid your temptation, but only the Word of God. Then, in the conflicts and fears that continually return to plague you, you should patiently look with hope for the righteousness that you have only by faith, though only in an incipient and imperfect form, until it is revealed perfectly and eternally in due time. “But I am not conscious of having righteousness, or at least I am only dimly conscious of it!” You are not to be conscious of having righteousness; you are to believe it. And unless you believe that you are righteous, you insult and blaspheme Christ, who has cleansed you by the washing of water with the Word and who in His death on the cross condemned and killed sin and death, so that through Him you might obtain eternal righteousness and life. You cannot deny this, unless you want to be obviously wicked, blasphemous, and contemptuous of God, of all the divine promises, of Christ, and of all his benefits. Then you cannot deny either that you are righteous.<sup>51</sup>

Luther leaves no room for doubt. The believer dare not look to his own heart for confidence. He will not find it there. Instead, the Christian directs his gaze to the cross and to the promises of God that are there fulfilled. In this way, the confidence of the Christian is built on the unshakeable foundation of the already-completed righteousness of Jesus – a righteousness that is outside of the sinful hearts of men and grasped through faith. In the vicarious suffering and death of Christ, believers find security and peace.

Mannermaa is not satisfied. Such a view, he argues, sets Christ as distant and leaves the believer to strive to ascend to Jesus.<sup>52</sup> He quotes Luther:

Christ should be set forth in such a way that apart from Him you see nothing at all and that you believe that nothing is nearer and closer to you than He. For He is not sitting idle in heaven but is completely present with us, active and living in us as chapter two says: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me,” and here: “You have put on Christ.” Therefore faith is a constant gaze that looks at nothing except Christ, the Victor over sin and death and the Dispenser of righteousness, salvation, and eternal life.<sup>53</sup>

Based on Luther’s words, Mannermaa explains, “According to Luther, faith is the right way of becoming a partaker of God because it possesses the whole fullness of the essence of God in

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51. *LW* 27: 26–27.

52. Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 28.

53. *LW* 26: 356.

Christ. It is in justifying faith that participation in the ‘divine life’ takes place.”<sup>54</sup> Tragically, by trying to magnify Christ’s independent role in justification, Mannermaa inadvertently puts the focus on the heart of the believer and his participation in Jesus’ divinity. Looking to the righteousness in his own heart, the believer has no choice but to seek confidence on the basis of his works. Although Mannermaa claims to emphasize Christ’s role in justification, Jesus’ redemptive work on the cross is banished to the background, while the righteousness of the Christian is emphasized. God is robbed of his glory in accomplishing salvation and the sinner is robbed of his comfort.

This was never Luther’s intention. It is certainly true that Jesus dwells in the hearts of believers. Indeed, the believer’s entire body is a temple of the Lord! But this belongs to the doctrine of sanctification. When examining the cause of the justification of the sinner, the heart of the Christian is to receive no attention whatsoever. This is because that which brings about the sinner’s “not-guilty” verdict has already occurred completely independent and outside of him.

Luther’s commentary continues,

The Jews, who were being bitten by the fiery serpents, were commanded by Moses to do nothing but look at that bronze serpent with a fixed gaze. Those who did so were healed merely by their fixed gaze at the serpent. But the others, who did not listen to Moses, looked at their wounds rather than at the serpent and died. Thus if I am to gain comfort in a struggle of conscience or in the agony of death, I must take hold of nothing except Christ alone by faith, and I must say: “I believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who suffered, was crucified, and died for me. In his wounds and death I see my sin; and in His resurrection I see victory over sin, death, and the devil, and my righteousness and life. I neither hear nor see anything but Him.”<sup>55</sup>

The familiar account of the bronze serpent (Num 21:4–9) provides us with many useful parallels to the Christian’s salvation from sin. The Israelites could not save themselves from the fiery

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54. Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 30.

55. *LW* 26: 357.

serpents. Their only hope came from God's gracious solution: the bronze serpent. When looking at the serpent, no change took place in the Israelite. Salvation came only through faith in God's promise attached to the serpent – completely outside and independent of the Israelites. So it is with Christ. Sinners who stand condemned gain no benefit from gazing at their own wounds. Luther's confidence – and ours – comes only from looking to Christ and clinging to him in faith. We see our sin in his death. We see our victory in his resurrection.

The blessed result of our connection to Christ through faith is our eternal life in heaven, but our justification in Christ also affects our lives here on earth. Through faith we are justified, and because we are justified we are also sanctified. Luther continues:

This is the true faith of Christ and in Christ, through which we become members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones (Eph. 5:30). Therefore in Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). Hence the speculation of the sectarians is vain when they imagine Christ is present in us "spiritually," that is, speculatively, but is present really in heaven. Christ and faith must be completely joined. We must simply take our place in heaven; and Christ must be, live, and work in us. But he lives and works in us, not speculatively but really, with presence and with power.<sup>56</sup>

Luther understood Christ's sanctifying presence in the hearts of believers as a result, not a cause, of the believers' justification. Because of Jesus' sacrifice on Calvary, God declares sinners righteous. When sinners receive this righteous verdict through faith, Christ himself dwells in their hearts. Sanctification flows from justification. Mannermaa disagrees. By not recognizing a distinction between justification and sanctification, he confuses the salvation of the sinner. He directs the Christian's attention to Christ's dwelling in his heart, inevitably leading to a dependence on the Christian's own works. In doing this Mannermaa draws attention away from Christ's redemptive work – the only true foundation for our righteousness before God.

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56. *LW* 26: 357.

### Jesus Christ as “Favor” and “Gift”

According to Mannermaa, the Lutheran distinction between justification and sanctification was manufactured after the death of Luther himself. The Reformer, he claims, made no such distinction. To elaborate his point, Mannermaa presents Jesus Christ as both “favor” and “gift:”

The idea that Christ is both God’s favor and God’s gift permeates the entire theology of Luther. “Favor” signifies God’s forgiveness and the removal of his wrath. In other words, “favor” is the attitude toward the human being in the “subject” of God. Christ as a “gift,” in turn, denotes the real self-giving of God to the human being. The presence of Christ in faith is real, and he is present in it with his essential attributes, such as righteousness, blessing, life, power, peace, and so forth. Thus, the notion of Christ as a “gift” means that the believing subject becomes a participant in the “divine nature.”<sup>57</sup>

Following Mannermaa’s terminology, Christ as “favor” refers to God’s forgiveness of our sins. One might even explain it as God’s forensic imputation of righteousness on the basis of Jesus’ redemption. Christ as “gift” refers to Christ himself as essential God. The gift of Christ is given to us when he takes residence in our hearts, sharing with us his divine attributes.

In the theology of Mannermaa, these two aspects of Christ form one greater whole: the justification of man. The sinner is justified before God by the forgiveness rendered by Christ as favor, and also by the essential righteousness of Christ as it is given as gift to those who receive Christ in faith. He calls Luther to his support:

Therefore, a Christian, properly defined, is free of all laws and is subject to nothing, internally or externally. But I purposely said, “to the extent that he is a Christian” (not “to the extent that he is a man or a woman”); that is, to the extent that he has his conscience trained, adorned, and enriched in faith, this great and inestimable treasure, or, as Paul calls it, “this inexpressible gift” (2 Cor. 9:15), which cannot be exalted and praised enough, since it makes men sons and heirs of God. Thus, a Christian is greater than the entire world. For in his heart he has this seemingly small gift; yet the smallness of this gift and treasure, which he holds in faith, is greater than heaven and earth, because Christ, who is this gift, is greater.<sup>58</sup>

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57. Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 19.

58. *LW* 26: 134.

Here Luther does indeed refer to Christ as gift. But when he does this, does he really have divine indwelling in mind? If not, in what sense does Luther call Christ “gift?”

Luther here comments on Galatians 2:16, where Paul writes, “Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.” Obviously, this verse presents a vital truth to both Paul’s and Luther’s understanding of salvation. As a disciple of the inspired Apostle defending the gospel against the Judaizers, Luther used the same words to defend the gospel against the works-righteousness of the Roman Catholics. Based on their specific historical contexts, both men felt a pressing need to clearly articulate on what basis we are saved.

After condemning any notion of righteousness through the law, Luther declares,

This is the means and the merit by which we obtain the forgiveness of sins and righteousness. “Because you believe in Me,” God says, “and your faith takes hold of Christ, whom I have freely given to you as your Justifier and Savior, therefore be righteous.” Thus God accepts you or accounts you righteous only on account of Christ, in whom you believe.<sup>59</sup>

It is on this basis that Luther later writes, “Therefore we define a Christian as follows: A Christian is not someone who has no sin or feels no sin; he is someone to whom, because of his faith in Christ, God does not impute his sin.<sup>60</sup> In Luther’s mind, “Christ as gift” refers to nothing more or less than Jesus sent to live a perfect life as our substitute and die an innocent death to remove sin from our record. This activity – completed altogether outside of us – is credited to us as righteousness by God’s grace through faith.

That is why Luther concludes:

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59. *LW* 26: 132.

60. *LW* 26: 133.

For through my works preceding grace I cannot merit grace by congruity,<sup>61</sup> nor can I deserve eternal life by condignity<sup>62</sup> through my merits following grace; but sin is forgiven and righteousness is imputed to him who believes in Christ. This confidence makes him a son and heir of God, who in hope possesses the promise of eternal life. Through faith in Christ, therefore, and not through the merit of congruity and of condignity, everything is granted to us – grace, peace, the forgiveness of sins, salvation, and eternal life.<sup>63</sup>

Luther will not allow justification and sanctification to be mixed. Whatever works, whatever active righteousness may result from the justification of the sinner, these ought not to be included in the understanding of how the sinner is justified. Jesus Christ as “favor” and “gift” expresses God’s undeserved love and *favor* given to sinners on account of the free *gift* of Jesus’ vicarious life and death.

### **A Proper Understanding of Divine Indwelling**

But does not Paul speak of divine indwelling? In Galatians 2:20 he writes, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Mannermaa draws strongly on this point. He quotes Luther:

Living in me as He does, Christ abolishes the Law, damns sin, and kills death; for at His presence all these cannot help disappearing. Christ is eternal Peace, Comfort, Righteousness, and Life, to which the terror of the Law, sadness of mind, sin, hell, and death have to yield. Abiding and living in me, Christ removes and absorbs all the evils that torment and afflict me. This attachment to Him causes me to be liberated from the terror of the Law and of sin, pulled out of my own skin, and transferred into Christ and into his kingdom, which is a kingdom of grace, righteousness, peace, joy, life, salvation, and eternal glory. Since I am in Him, no evil can harm me.

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61. Merit of Congruity: Good works that merit a reward based on God’s generosity; In Roman Catholic doctrine, these are good works done by those in a state of sin which are rewarded by God with the infusion of “first grace.”

62. Merit of Condignity: Good works that merit a reward based on their intrinsic worth; In Roman Catholic doctrine, these are good works done by those in a state of grace which earn eternal rewards.

63. *LW* 26: 134–135.



Meanwhile my old man (Eph. 4:22) remains outside and is subject to the Law, But so far as justification is concerned, Christ and I must be so closely attached that He lives in me and I in Him. What a marvelous way of speaking! Because He lives in me, whatever grace, righteousness, life, peace, and salvation there is in me is all Christ's; nevertheless, it is mine as well, by the cementing and attachment that are through faith, by which we become as one body in the Spirit. Since Christ lives in me, grace, righteousness, life, and eternal salvation must be present with Him; and the Law, sin, and death must be absent. Indeed, the Law must be crucified, devoured, and abolished by the Law – and sin by sin, death by death, the devil by the devil. In this way Paul seeks to withdraw us completely from ourselves, from the Law, and from works, and to transplant us into Christ and faith in Christ, so that in the area of justification we look only at grace, and separate it far from the Law and from works, which belong far away.<sup>64</sup>

Based on Luther's remarks, Mannermaa concludes, "The life that the Christian now lives *is*, in an ontologically real manner, Christ himself."<sup>65</sup> The sinner disappears and is replaced with Christ. According to Mannermaa, here in justification, we see Christ and the believer united into one person.

As sinners are justified by the donation of Christ himself with his divine attributes into their hearts, a transformation occurs: the sinner is remade in the likeness of Christ and becomes "God." Mannermaa asserts, "Luther does not hesitate to conclude that in faith the human being becomes 'God,' not in substance but through participation."<sup>66</sup> In justification, believers share – even *participate* – in Christ's divinity, their sin and corruption are expelled from their hearts, and God recognizes them as righteous because of the gift of his Son's essential righteousness within them.

Is this really what Luther and Paul mean to say? How can that be when in other places they have so clearly spoken of justification as entirely forensic? The apparent discrepancy is solved by a proper understanding of the *ordo salutis* (order of salvation). The *ordo salutis* refers

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64. *LW* 26: 167–168.

65. Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 39, emphasis his.

66. Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 42.

to a logical succession of events that take place between God and the sinner. Before faith exists, the sinner is a lost and condemned enemy of God. The sinner is first *called* by God through his Word. Through the power of the gospel, the sinner is then *converted*, and faith begins. Through faith in his Savior, the believer is now *justified*. As a result, the believer is *renewed* in his spiritual life and God resides in his heart through *divine indwelling*. Through the work of the Holy Spirit in this “mystic union,” the child of God is daily *sanctified*. As he is sanctified, the faith of the believer naturally produces good works that are pleasing to God *only* for the sake of the meritorious work of Jesus Christ.

The *ordo salutis* is not meant to show a temporal order of events, but rather a cause – effect relationship. In point of fact, the entire *ordo salutis* occurs simultaneously – at the very moment the sinner is converted, he is also justified. Having been justified, he is renewed and sanctified through the divine presence of God in his heart. This is why Luther is able to view Christ’s indwelling in such close connection with justification. He does not mean to say that Christ’s dwelling in the hearts of believers is the *cause* of justification as Mannermaa claims, but rather the *result*. Thus sinners are not justified by the donation of Christ in their hearts, but Christ dwells in their hearts because they are justified.

It is vitally important to maintain the causal relationship between the proceeding steps of justification and sanctification. The *Formula of Concord* explains:

For good works do not precede faith, nor does sanctification precede justification. Instead, first of all, in conversion, the Holy Spirit kindles faith in us through the hearing of the gospel. This faith lays hold of God’s grace in Christ, and through it a person is justified. Therefore, once people are justified, the Holy Spirit also renews and sanctifies them. From this renewal and sanctification, the fruits of good works follow. This is not to be understood as if justification and sanctification are separated from each other in such a way that a true faith can exist for a while along with an evil intention, but rather this only indicates the order in which the one thing precedes or follows the other. For what Dr. Luther correctly said remains true: faith and good works fit beautifully together and

belong together. But it is faith alone that lays hold of the blessing, apart from works, and yet it is never, ever alone.<sup>67</sup>

It is utterly impossible for the sinner to be justified without also being sanctified. The two are closely knit together, but they *must* be properly distinguished. In his *Examination of the Council of Trent*, Martin Chemnitz reaffirms this point:

It is certain that both the remission of sins and the renewal of the Holy Spirit in which the Holy Spirit kindles new virtues in those who believe are blessings of the Son of God, the Mediator. For Christ by His suffering merited for us not only the remission of sins, but also this, that on account of His merit the Holy Spirit is given to us, that we may be renewed in the spirit of our mind. We say, indeed, that these benefits of the Son of God are connected, so that, when we are reconciled, the Spirit of renewal is at the same time given. But we do not for this reason confuse, but rather distinguish them, so that we may assign to each its place, order, and peculiar nature, as we have learned it from the Scripture, namely, so that reconciliation, or remission of sins, precedes and the beginning of love, or of the new obedience, follows after; chiefly, however, that faith may be certain that it has a reconciled God and remission of sins not because of the renewal, which follows and which has been begun, but because of the Mediator, the Son of God.<sup>68</sup>

So determined is Chemnitz that our salvation rest on Christ alone that he later states, “That glory cannot be taken away from Christ and transferred to either our renewal or our obedience without blasphemy.”<sup>69</sup> When his salvation is built on any foundation other than the redeeming work of Christ, the sinner will never find solid ground.

Scripture itself also bears witness to this truth. Galatians 2:20 (quoted above) provides a vivid example.<sup>70</sup> Paul writes, “I have been crucified with Christ.” Through faith, Jesus’ vicarious death counts for Paul. Paul the sinner was crucified. Paul the *Christian* has been justified. He continues, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” As a result of Paul’s

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67. FC, SD III: 41.

68. Martin Chemnitz, *Chemnitz’s Works, Volume 1: Examination of the Council of Trent I*, translated by Fred Kramer, (St. Louis: Concordia, 2007), 465.

69. Chemnitz, 491.

70. Cf. also Romans 8:29–30, Titus 2:11–14, John 15:1–5, and Ephesians 2:1–10.

justification, Christ has taken up residence in his heart. Paul describes his new life in Christ by saying, “The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Christ lived a perfect life and died an innocent death in Paul’s place. On account of Christ’s merit alone, Paul is declared righteous in God’s sight. He is justified through faith. God’s dwelling in Paul’s heart and Paul’s sanctification are blessed results. Paul’s good works are a joyous response, made possible only by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit which resulted from the justification sealed in the blood of Christ.

When understood in this way, the divine indwelling of Christ offers great comfort to the believer. For Luther, the focus is never on the believer, but always on Christ and his vicarious atonement. This is why he says, “In this way Paul seeks to withdraw us completely from ourselves, from the Law, and from works, and to transplant us into Christ and faith in Christ, so that in the area of justification we look only at grace, and separate it far from the Law and from works, which belong far away.”<sup>71</sup> In justification, faith takes hold of God’s grace won on the cross and distributed in Word and Sacrament. As we have heard Luther say many times, it is on the basis of Christ’s sacrificial death that our sins are forgiven and we are declared righteous before God. Again he states:

For He did not die to make the righteous righteous; He died to make sinners into righteous men, the friends and sons of God, and heirs of all heavenly gifts. Therefore since I feel and confess that I am a sinner on account of the transgression of Adam, why should I not say that I am righteous on account of the righteousness of Christ, especially when I hear that He loved me and gave Himself for me?<sup>72</sup>

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71. *LW* 26: 168, originally quoted on page 29.

72. *LW* 26: 179.

Righteousness and justification before God are credited to man on account of Jesus' *vicarious* righteousness and salvific death. Jesus' *indwelling* righteousness belongs entirely to the doctrine of sanctification.

Because the sinner is declared righteous in God's sight, he is as a result blessed with the presence of Christ in his heart. The Old Man has been crucified and the New has risen, remade in the image of Christ, just as we have already heard Paul declare: "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). The believer – already completely righteous in the sight of God as a result of Jesus' sacrifice – is now strengthened in righteousness by the work of Christ (indeed, the Holy Trinity!) in his heart. This process of being strengthened in righteousness is in no way meritorious – only the perfect righteousness of Christ merits salvation for sinners. Rather, as Christians daily mature in faith through the work of Christ in their hearts, the fruits of righteousness that follow serve as resultant evidence of their pre-existing justification.

So closely does the Christian exist with his God that the Divine dwells within him. In this relationship, Luther is right to say that the indwelling Christ "absorbs all the evils that torment and afflict me."<sup>73</sup> In a sense, Mannermaa is correct in saying that the believer is "deified." Because we have been justified through faith on the basis of Jesus' redemptive work, we are reconciled with God. As a result, God himself dwells in our hearts, sanctifying us and allowing us to produce fruits of faith. But the salvation of the sinner, his confidence, and his comfort must be built *only* on the foundation of Christ crucified. With his confusion of the *ordo salutis*, Mannermaa seeks to draw the confidence of the Christian from sanctification rather than

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73. LW 26: 167.

justification. This creates a rather large problem: If the sinner looks to his sanctification for confidence, either he will not find it or he will lie to himself.

### *Simul Justus et Peccator*

A critical Scriptural truth to bear in mind regarding the mystical union between Christ and the believer is that although the believer is completely righteous in the sight of God, the indwelling of Christ will never create complete *effectual* righteousness<sup>74</sup> in the heart of the sinner this side of eternity. This paradox is often explained with the statement that the Christian is *simul justus et peccator* – at the same time saint and sinner. How can this tension be allowed to stand?

Because Mannermaa understands the mystical union as part of the doctrine of justification, based on *simul justus et peccator*, it becomes necessary for him to explain how the justification of the sinner can be complete and progressive at the same time. He does this by pointing to the righteousness caused by the indwelling of Christ as the “initial” righteousness: “Luther’s fundamental idea can be expressed by saying that faith is the beginning of real righteousness, while through imputation this initial righteousness is ‘perfected’ as long as one lives in this age. It is because of the imperfectness of faith that imputation is necessary.”<sup>75</sup> Mannermaa here recognizes the need for a forensic declaration of righteousness, but only where the actual righteousness worked by the indwelling Christ falls short of perfection.

Tragically, by failing to see the indwelling of Christ as an aspect of progressive sanctification, Mannermaa makes justification progressive and falls into a synergistic view of

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74. I.e. righteousness that shows itself in the life of the believer.

75. Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 56.

salvation. Because the divine righteousness of Christ is within him, the believer lives in accordance with God's will. Where he fails, God is there to forgive his mistakes. He contends,

Luther states explicitly that Christians live "partly in the flesh and partly in the Spirit," which means that they are partly sinners and partly righteous. The "flesh," or the "old Adam," has certainly not died in Christians, and will not die in this life. The flesh is opposed to the "Spirit," and the "Spirit" is opposed to the flesh. However, in the course of this battle the present Christ "sweeps" the old Adam [Eve] away and "cleanses" believers.<sup>76</sup>

Mannermaa sees a partial justification on the basis of the actual, yet incomplete, righteousness of the believer. To support his view, he quotes Luther:

Thus we have received the first fruits of the Spirit (Rom. 8:23), and the leaven hidden in the lump; the whole lump has not yet been leavened, but it is beginning to be leavened. If I look at the leaven, I see nothing but the leaven; but if I look at the mass of the lump, there is not merely the leaven anymore. Thus if I look at Christ, I am completely holy and pure, and I know nothing at all about the Law; for Christ is my leaven. But if I look at my flesh, I feel greed, sexual desire, anger, pride, the terror of death, sadness, fear, hate, grumbling, and impatience against God.<sup>77</sup>

Mannermaa sees Luther's treatment of his daily struggle against his sinful flesh as a reference to justification. On the contrary, in this passage Luther is explaining sanctification.

Immediately prior to Mannermaa's quotation of Luther, the Reformer writes,

Just as [Christ] once came into the world at a specific time to redeem us from the harsh dominion of our custodian [the law], so He comes to us spiritually every day, causing us to grow in faith and in our knowledge of Him. Thus the conscience takes hold of Christ more perfectly day by day; and day by day the law of flesh and sin, the fear of death, and whatever other evils the Law brings with it are diminishing. For as long as we live in a flesh that is not free of sin, so long the Law keeps coming back and performing its function, more in one person and less in another, not to harm but to save. This discipline of the Law is the daily mortification of the flesh, the reason, and our powers and the renewal of our mind. (2 Cor. 4:16)<sup>78</sup>

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76. Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 58–59.

77. *LW* 26: 350.

78. *LW* 26: 349–350.

Here it is obvious that Luther understands Christ's work in justification as distinct from his work in sanctification. Further, Christ's work in justification is complete: Christ came into the world at a *specific* time to redeem us. Because of this, our righteousness before God is already complete. When Luther says that Christ comes to us spiritually every day, here he refers to Christ's dwelling in our hearts, resulting in our sanctification.

In this passage from Luther, we also see a clear presentation of *simul justus et peccator*. Because sin still clings to our flesh, sanctification will never be complete in this life. That is why it is so important that the believer's focus remain on Christ. There he sees nothing but complete righteousness, won by the blood of his Savior.

Paul also gives clear testimony to *simul justus et peccator* in Galatians 5:17. He writes, "For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do." Although the Spirit of God is at work in the hearts of believers, the sinful flesh is still active in opposing God's work. In himself, the sinner is still sinful – not only partly, but *completely*. Yet in view of his justification in Christ, the saint is also *completely* righteous. Forgiven in Christ, and with the help of God, the justified believer strives to cast off the Old Adam and live to please God. This is certainly not done to earn God's favor. That has already been done by the merit of Christ. It is done because the believer, grafted into Christ and with Christ dwelling in his heart, delights in following God's law.

Luther draws attention to the battle within each believer saying,

When someone becomes aware of this battle of the flesh, he should not lose heart on this account; but by the Spirit he should fight back and say: "I am a sinner, and I am aware of my sin; for I have not yet put off my flesh, to which sin will cling as long as it lives. But I will obey the Spirit rather than the flesh. That is, by faith and hope I will take hold of



Christ. I will fortify myself with His Word, and thus fortified I will refuse to gratify the desires of the flesh.”<sup>79</sup>

The Christian dare not look to this internal struggle as a basis for confidence of salvation.

Confidence is only to be found in Christ – in his perfect life and innocent death.

If the Christian is honest, when he looks to himself he will notice that he is no less sinful than the rest of the world. However, he need not despair. Although he still sees and feels the effects of sin, his righteousness before God is built on the solid foundation of his Savior. Luther writes,

A believer’s sin is the same sin and sin just as great as that of an unbeliever. To the believer, however, it is forgiven and not imputed, while to the unbeliever it is retained and imputed. To the former it is venial; to the latter it is mortal. This is not because of a difference between the sins, as though the believer’s sin were smaller and the unbeliever’s larger, but because of a difference between the persons. For the believer knows that his sin is forgiven him on account of Christ, who has expiated it by his death. Even though he has sins and commits sin, he remains godly. On the other hand, when the unbeliever commits sin, he remains ungodly. This is the wisdom and comfort of those who are truly godly, that even if they have sins and commit sins, they know that because of their faith in Christ these are not imputed to them.<sup>80</sup>

The struggle of those who are simultaneously saint and sinner will not end in this life. Yet believers in the promises of God may take infinite comfort. Their righteousness before God is eternally sealed in the cross and empty tomb of Christ. They are saints of God and heirs of heaven. And while they live struggling with sin in the world, they have the priceless blessing of the divine indwelling of Christ to strengthen them in faith and in righteousness.

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79. *LW 27: 72–73.*

80. *LW 27: 76.*

## CONCLUSION

The doctrine of justification is central to everything we believe, teach, and confess. It truly is the doctrine “by which the church stands or falls.” It should not surprise us that no doctrine has been attacked by Satan as fiercely or as often. History presents countless examples of Christian groups confusing the distinction between justification and sanctification and thereby robbing God of his glory and sinners of their comfort in the gospel.

The Eastern Orthodox believe that salvation consists in *theosis* – the progressive journey of human cooperation with God and his grace to participate in his divinity. Their admitted synergism makes the sinner partially responsible for his own salvation. The ecumenical endeavor of the Finnish Lutheran Church has placed Tuomo Mannermaa and his followers on a dangerous path. By establishing the divine indwelling of Christ as the basis of the sinner’s righteousness before God, they have taken the focus away from Jesus’ redemptive work on the cross and overemphasized the progressive sanctification in the heart of the believer, conflating sanctification with justification. Their soteriology bears the odor of Eastern Orthodox synergism.

The *Formula of Concord* was right to condemn this error when it was originally preached by Andreas Osiander. With clear language the formulators present the justification of the sinner as the forensic verdict of righteousness given by God on account of the vicarious suffering and death of Jesus Christ. This understanding of justification is an accurate portrayal of the theology of Martin Luther, and of Holy Scripture. Comfort and confidence cannot be found on the basis of works. Salvation cannot be built on a foundation of sanctification. Any attempt to do so abuses both justification and sanctification. Through faith, the sinner is declared righteous before God

*only* for the sake of Christ's sacrifice in his place. The justification of the Christian is sealed in the blood of his Savior.

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